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ABSTRACT

The Opportunities Program is a collaboration between the Illinois state welfare program and the City Colleges of Chicago to educate/train welfare recipients in short-term programs. A review of the research identified these effective student retention strategies: student support, high quality instruction, and remediation. A review of research on student success focused on student characteristics, employment statistics, and gender and race/ethnicity differences. The completion rates for 119 Opportunities Program students were examined. The study population included students from the food technology, office technology, and health technology programs at Dawson Technical Institute in Chicago. Data were collected from the examination of college records. School records showed that 75 percent of all students completed programs: 13 percent in food technology, 19 percent in office technology, and 43 percent in health technology. Examination of the chi-square test scores indicated sample groups were significantly different. Findings may have been influenced by the following factors: job availability, interest, and experience; demand for higher education and technical competence; low job entrance salaries; familial or personal problems; preparation of the students; quality of the program/instruction; and availability of resources. (Contains 11 references.) (YLB)

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Effect of Type Opportunity Technological Programs on the Completion Rate of Opportunity Program Students

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Welfare reform has been a subject the politicians both democratic and republican have debated over the past decade.

The Federal Government has decided to turn over the task of reform to the states to implement their individual plans as they see fit.

The Opportunities Program is a collaboration between the state welfare program - Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and the City Colleges of Chicago (CCC), to educate /train this population in short term programs thereby reducing the numbers and returning them back to responsible tax paying members of the state.

Although a number of private and nonprofit agencies have worked with AFDC to train this population and have given the state their outcome or result, this is the first time that the City Colleges of Chicago have been contracted to work with, educate/train, and find employment for this population.

Consequently, additional research with improved designs is needed to replicate previous studies. The current study would not only add to the state of knowledge in this area, but fill a much need information gap on the completion rate of the participants in there vocational training programs. The results of the study will be of value to the State Welfare Dependent and the City Colleges of Chicago.

The Federal Government and the State of Illinois provide a comprehensive array of grant programs at the city colleges to meet the needs of special populations. Some of the grants administered include the following: (1) Educational Equity (funded by the Carl Perkins Act), empowering women by increasing their knowledge of rights, resources, and strategies for achieving economic equity; (2) Educational Talent Search (funded by the Department of Education, assisting students in completing their high school education and pursing further education or training; (3) Perkins Special Populations (funded by the Carl Perkins Act), providing economic, academic, and/or disability assistance to vocational students in nursing, office careers, business, and accounting; (4) Single Parent Displaced Homemaker (funded by Carl Perkins Act), enabling single parents, displaced homemakers, and single women to become self-sufficient through needs assessment and career exploration activities and referrals to community resources; (5) Student Support Services (funded by the Department of Education), providing student success activities to improve retention and graduation rates; and (6) Supportive

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Learning Services and Training For Jobs (both funded by the Job Training Partnership Act), assisting special needs individuals in the development of skills necessary for employment and economic self-sufficiency.

The Opportunities Program started out as a grant program (in 1993) but, with welfare reform being such an important task, the state, through the AFDC and the City Colleges of Chicago institutionalized the program (in 1995), making it available at all of the city colleges.

Mumford and Fron (1994) study titled: Student Retention: Creating student success. Monograph number two, discussed effective student retention strategies which involved creating a vision and committing to that vision, ensuring that processes are applied systematically, providing support, and offering high quality instruction. Creating an effective program means having a real sense of what "program completion" is, how the state and programs define and measure retention, and how the program is organized and operated to achieve better retention rates. Effective student support strategies are as follows: display respect and build rapport; counsel students; establish trust between instructor and student; help students develop effective coping strategies; refer students to agencies/services for nonacademic needs; and build on family support. High quality instruction ensures that students succeed by providing them with opportunities for continued success, tangible evidence of progress, relevant instruction, support in class/tutoring sessions to develop program affiliation and rapport with instructors and students, and involvement in setting program goals. Structural areas influencing retention include recruitment, orientation, assessment and placement, student recognition and activities, student evaluation, student contact system, instructional delivery system, support system, and qualified personnel.

England (1994) reported in the Evaluation of Developmental Programs, while looking for more accurate data on outcomes for remedial programs at McLennan Community College in Texas tracked the progress of 743 full time, degree-seeking, first time in college students who entered in full 1991, including students not needing remediation and those not completing their remedial program. Specifically, the study sought to determine the level of remediation needed and the watch between needs and remedial enrollment, the extent that developmental programs improved basic skills, and the extent that the programs prepared skill deficient students for success in college. Results of the study included the following: (1) in general, minority students needed more remediation than White students and African-American needed more than Hispanics; (2) While a little over half of the students in remediation for reading and writing progressed to the final course in the sequences, they did not perform as well in college level work as those who did not need remediation; (3) successful completion of reading and writing coursed and course sequences was shown to be important for success in the Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP) test, while students who were successful in any mathematics course had high success rates on the test; and (4) for students needing remediation in three areas, 12.1% transferred after 3 years, composed to 45.6% of non-remedial students.

Gutierrez-Marquez (1994) in a study designed to obtain a more complete picture of student outcomes, the City Colleges of Chicago looked at a six year period of academic experiences of 10,777 students who entered in fall of 1986 with no previous college experience. Student

characteristics, persistence, completion of a degree or a certificate, and two to a four year institution outcomes from Fall 1986 to Spring 1992 revealed that 12.9% transferred, 8.1% completed a degree or certificate, and 4.4% were still enrolled. Also, 12 Credit hour students rated higher than the whole cohort regarding transfer, completion, and persistence. Rates were higher for those with 2 semesters and in transfer programs. Students success findings were: (1) student grade point average and an intent to transfer were positively related to success; (2) both age and weekly job hours were negatively related to success rates; (3) ethnicity and original intent were also found to be significantly related to outcome; and (4)factors with a significant impact included gender, student enrollment in a baccalaureate or transfer program, and family income.

Klitzke (1987) in a review looking at Secondary Vocational Education in Wisconsin, using self evaluation data from 55 schools, and gathering data from graduates, employers, advisory committee members, staff, and current students. Findings from the date were synthesized under five outcomes areas, employment, post secondary training, training satisfaction, male/female differences, and special needs. Findings were: (1) technology education graduated received the highest average wage of any program area, and business education graduates wages increased 62% in the 5 years after graduation; (2) two-thirds of graduates are working in jobs related to their high school vocational training; (3) vocational graduates had less unemployment then their contemporaries without such education; (4) vocational education graduates are more likely to go on to further education than to go into the job market immediately; (5) more male graduates are working full or part-time, whereas more female graduates are full or part-time students; and (6) special needs students and graduates have high rates of satisfaction with the program, but these students/graduates are more likely to be unemployed than other vocational graduates and less likely to continue their education after high school.

A report from the Twentieth Annual 1989 Ohio State Council on Vocational Technical Education revealed employment statistics which showed that 95% of the students who graduated from a vocational program in Ohio's secondary schools in 1988 were employed, with over three-fourths of them employed in jobs related to their training; 98.6% of the students who completed postsecondary and full-time adult programs in 1988 were employed, with 93.5 percent of them employed in jobs related to their training; and federal income tax records showed that Ohio vocational and technical graduated have predominately higher incomes and low rates of unemployment 4 and 5 years after graduation then others in the general population with the same age, schooling, and residential-location characteristics. Among the enrollment statistics reported were that 1,432,237. Students were enrolled in vocational and career education programs in Ohio; More than 55.8 percent of Ohio's 11th and 12th grade secondary students were enrolled in Ohio vocational education; 306, 930 adults were enrolled in Ohio vocational education programs in 1989; and more than 1,777 Ohio youth and adults were served through vocational education programs for the incarcerated in Ohio.

A study investigating the circumstances and conditions that influenced the decision to take a training-related position was conducted by Campbell (1987), and findings suggested that the training-related placement rate for the first and current job after high school graduation was about 42%; on the average, high school vocational graduates held training-related jobs 48% of

the total time they were employed. Multivariate analysis suggested that high grades in the vocation specialty were positively correlated with training-related placement; and gender remained on e of the strongest predicators of earnings despite training-related placement. Substantial concentration in a vocational specialty was one of the most influential factors in getting and keeping a training-related job, and the trade and industrial specialty was also associated consistently with holding a training-related job. The lack of consistent results for gender and race/ethnicity suggested that the problem of getting and holding a training-related job was general for male vocational graduates and not, as with women, applicable to specific sub-groups.

Clagett (1988) concluded from his survey conducted on the 1987 graduates of Prince George's Community College's occupational programs to assess graduates success in obtaining full-time employment and their ratings of their preparation for employment a questionnaire was mailed to all 933 students receiving an associate degree or certificate during fiscal year 1987. Study findings based on a 57% response rate were: (1) 90% of the graduates were employed, with 78% working full-time; (2) 63% were employed full time in jobs related to their studies; (3) only 45% had obtained their current employment after graduation; (4) 87% rated their preparation for employment as "very good"; (5) full-time employment rates ranged from 36% for marketing management majors to 86% for allied health majors; (6) Electronic Technology majors gave the fewest high ratings of their preparation for employment, while 100% of the accounting and paralegal graduates rated their preparation as "good" or "very good"; and (7) between 1980 and 1984, graduates of nursing, allied health, and office technology programs had the most success obtaining full-time jobs related to their studies.

Suppanean (1995) and the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges summarized in their survey to determine the outcomes and impact of the timber-impacted benefits (TRB) programs on the dislocated workers and their timber communities, after the first two years of operation the TRB students vocational outcomes from the 1991-93 period Study findings included the following: (1) the employment rate at the end of the period for all TRB students completing training was 79%, compared to 84% for those who completed vocational programs; (2) employed former TRB students recovered 87% of their former wage level; (3) employed graduates earned a median entry-level wage of $10.85 per hour; (4) 7 to 9 months after graduation or leaving college, TBR students had an unemployment rate of 9%, compared to 11% for other residents of timber-impacted countries; (5) 85% were satisfied with their training program; (6) TBR students had a higher graduation rate than other students in timber-impacted countries; (7) the multiplier effect of TBR funds on timber communities resulted in $64 million in economic activity in the private sector; and (8) 55% of TBR students who received training in occupational areas remained in their community following program completion.

Procedures

Population/Sample:

The population for this study will include 119 students from the Food Technology, Office Technology, and Health Technology programs. The students attended Dawson Technical Institute which is located in a predominately low socio-economic neighborhood in Chicago's minority Grand Boulevard area. The population is comprised of 98% minority students. From the 119 Food Technology, Office Technology, and Health Technology program students, the school records showed that 75 % completed programs. 13% in Food Technology, 19% from Office Technology, and 43% from Health Technology.

Soon after finding employment, students are required to report employment information to their assigned mentor. The mentor fills out a Illinois Department of Public Aid form 2800, which is submitted to the students local IDPA office. A copy of that form, along with a job placement form is also given to the Business Liaison of the Opportunities Program, who inputs the information into a data base. This information is used for reporting program statistics. The design is pertinent only to control group.

Data was collected from the examination of college records. Permission was obtained from college officials and program executive director. The single group pretest-posttest design was used.

The findings will be tabulated using the Chi Square test employed at the .05 level of confidence to determine if there is any statistically significant difference.

Results

The sample for the study included 119 students of the Dawson Technical Institute. Course requirements included; complete weekly assignments, interim quizzes, midterm examination, class participation, and final examination. Health Technology and Food Technology programs are also required to take a test for state certification.. Table 1 summarizes the statistical analyses.

Examination of the Chi-Square test scores indicate that the sample groups were significantly different. The Food Technology with a Chi-Square score of 5.76, Office Technology 1.44, Health Technology 12.96. This finding and other information about the sample programs which is presented (see table 1) permits the conclusion that the three programs were not equivalent in completion rate.

TABLE I

PROGRAMS

C E L L C H I - S Q U A R E V A L U E S

Food Technology	13.000	"E"=	25.000	CHI-SQUARE	5.760 *
Office Technology	19.000	"E"=	25.000	CHI-SQUARE	1.440 **
Health Technology	43.000	"E"=	25.000	CHI-SQUARE	12.960

C H I - S Q U A R E = 20.160

THERE WAS 1 ROW AND THERE WERE 3 COLUMNS IN THE CONTINGENCY TABLE.

DEGREES OF FREEDOM = (C - 1) = (3 - 1) = 2

***Significant at the .05 level (1.440 < 12.960)**

****Significant at the .01 level (1.440 < 12.960)**

The results in Table I indicate that opportunity program students in the Health Technology program had a significantly (.01) higher completion rate of 45% as compared to 13% in the Food Technology program and significantly (.05) higher completion rate of 19% for students in the Office Technology program. However, there was no significant difference the completion rate between the Food Technology students (13%) and the completion rate of Office Technology students (19%).

The findings may have been influenced by the availability of jobs and interest and experience in the health area. Job availability may also have been affected by the lowering of requirements in the area nursing and health care. Whereas the lower completion rate for students office technology may have been influence by the demand for higher education and technical competence, particularly in computer technology and the need to upgrade skills, e.g., keyboarding skills and knowledge of software packages. The lowest 13% completion rate of students in the food technology program may have been influenced by low job entrance salaries in this field.

The results could have been affected by familial or personal problems or preparation of the students or the quality of the program/instruction and the availability of resources.

Additional research needs to be conducted. The research design should include a personal entrance and exit program evaluation of all students. These quantitative/qualitative data would more valid and reliable information on the preparation and needs of the students and relevancy and quality of the programs.

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